

The Influence of Leadership Style on Public Sector Employee Performance

*Leadership Style on
Employee
Performance*

Suwardhi Pantih

Universitas Sintuwu Maroso; Poso, Indonesia
E-Mail: suwardhipantih.unsimar@gmail.com

Akhsanul Khaq

Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan Republik Indonesia; Jakarta, Indonesia

Suwarno

Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kesatuan; Bogor, Indonesia

1951

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ABSTRACT

The success of public sector organizations in achieving optimal performance is greatly influenced by leadership style and employee work motivation. However, the implementation of effective leadership and providing adequate motivation are still challenges. This study aims to examine the effect of leadership style on employee performance with work motivation as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach is used to obtain an objective and measurable picture. Data were collected through a five-point Likert scale questionnaire from all employees of Central Sulawesi, with a total of 172 respondents using a saturated sampling technique. The analysis was carried out using SmartPLS 3 software through path analysis to test direct and indirect effects. The results show that leadership style has a significant effect on work motivation, and work motivation has a significant effect on employee performance. Furthermore, work motivation is proven to mediate the relationship between leadership style and performance significantly. However, the direct effect of leadership style on employee performance is not statistically significant. This finding confirms the importance of work motivation as an intermediary in improving public sector performance.

Keywords: *Employee Performance, Leadership Style, Public Sector, Work Motivation.*

ABSTRAK

Keberhasilan organisasi sektor publik dalam mencapai kinerja optimal sangat dipengaruhi oleh gaya kepemimpinan dan motivasi kerja pegawai. Namun, penerapan kepemimpinan yang efektif dan pemberian motivasi yang memadai masih menjadi tantangan. Penelitian ini bertujuan menguji pengaruh gaya kepemimpinan terhadap kinerja pegawai dengan motivasi kerja sebagai variabel mediasi. Pendekatan kuantitatif digunakan untuk memperoleh gambaran objektif dan terukur. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner skala Likert lima poin dari seluruh pegawai Sulawesi Tengah, dengan jumlah responden sebanyak 172 orang menggunakan teknik sampling jenuh. Analisis dilakukan dengan perangkat lunak SmartPLS 3 melalui analisis jalur untuk menguji pengaruh langsung dan tidak langsung. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa gaya kepemimpinan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap motivasi kerja, dan motivasi kerja berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kinerja pegawai. Selanjutnya, motivasi kerja terbukti memediasi hubungan antara gaya kepemimpinan dan kinerja secara signifikan. Namun, pengaruh langsung gaya kepemimpinan terhadap kinerja pegawai tidak signifikan secara statistik. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya motivasi kerja sebagai perantara dalam meningkatkan kinerja sektor publik.

Kata kunci: *Kinerja Karyawan, Gaya Kepemimpinan, Sektor Publik, Motivasi Kerja.*

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INTRODUCTION

In public sector organizations, the achievement of optimal performance largely depends on the effectiveness of human resource management (HRM). According to Zhenjing et al. (2022), effective HRM goes beyond administrative functions and involves comprehensive strategic planning, including the establishment of clear work objectives, continuous training and development, as well as fair and constructive evaluation and reward systems. In the context of public service, the need to create a productive and responsive work environment is becoming increasingly urgent, given the high public expectations regarding the quality of government services (Alam et al., 2021; Baig et al., 2021). However, in practice, public sector organizations continue to face various fundamental challenges (Ahmad et al., 2022). Schwarz et al. (2020) note that delays in task completion, low employee attendance rates, and weak internal monitoring systems indicate that personnel management is not yet functioning optimally. These irregularities show that fundamental aspects of HRM, such as effective leadership and performance monitoring systems, have not been implemented systematically and sustainably (Maheswari, 2022; Fitri et al., 2023).

These issues illustrate that leadership style has a significant influence on employee performance, especially in public organizations that have a strong hierarchical structure and direct service responsibilities to the community. According to Boudlaie et al. (2022), a consultative leadership style reflects a participatory approach, but it may not be effective if not accompanied by firmness, consistent supervision, and the ability to conduct real-time performance evaluations. In addition to leadership, internal work motivation is an essential factor that determines the quality and timeliness of public services. Purwanto et al. (2020) and Pariesti and Christa (2022) stated that when the intrinsic drive to work is not strongly developed, service delivery may be detrimental. Therefore, improving performance in the public sector requires synergy between adaptive leadership styles, strategic HRM systems, and employee empowerment focused on responsibility and professional work ethics. Achieving optimal performance cannot be accomplished through administrative approaches alone; it requires a transformation of work culture and results-oriented leadership (Javed et al., 2021).

In addition, leadership style plays a crucial role in influencing employee work motivation, which in turn directly impacts their performance. According to Qing et al. (2020), effective leadership, such as transformational or democratic styles, can create a supportive environment that empowers employees to reach their full potential. Leaders who adopt a transformational style, for instance, are able to inspire and motivate employees by setting a clear vision, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging personal development (Haryono & Sulisty, 2020; Khan et al., 2023). Meanwhile, a democratic leadership style that involves employees in decision-making processes can increase their sense of ownership and commitment to their work. Furthermore, work motivation also significantly affects employee performance. When employees are motivated whether intrinsically or extrinsically they tend to be more enthusiastic and committed to achieving the organization's goals (Marewo et al., 2020). With high levels of motivation, employees are likely to demonstrate better performance, increased productivity, and more innovation. Therefore, the positive relationship between effective leadership styles and work motivation is essential for fostering high performance within organizations (Sinambela, 2021). Leaders who understand and implement leadership styles that align with the needs of their teams can bring about positive impacts on overall organizational performance (Donkor et al., 2021; Hafidzi et al., 2023).

The problem statement in this study includes fundamental questions regarding the direct impact of leadership style on employee performance and how leadership influences their work motivation. This research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how leadership style contributes to improving employee performance in the public sector. Additionally, the study analyzes the extent to which work motivation affects employee performance and whether work motivation acts as a mediating variable in the relationship between leadership style and performance. In the public sector, leadership effectiveness is

not only measured by the ability to direct employees but also by the capacity to foster sustained work motivation. Therefore, the leadership style adopted by public sector leaders is expected not only to provide clear direction but also to create a work environment that supports the professional growth of employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Leadership Style, Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Leadership style refers to the way a leader directs, motivates, guides, and manages team members to achieve shared goals, encompassing behaviors, values, and methods used to inspire the team toward desired objectives (Daraba et al., 2021). This style is not universal—there is no one-size-fits-all leadership style that is effective in every situation. A leader's behavior, whether authoritarian, democratic, or laissez-faire, significantly influences team dynamics (Dastane, 2020). Moreover, the values that underpin a leader's decisions and actions play a crucial role in shaping how employees respond to and interact with their leader (Costa et al., 2021; Khassawneh & Elrehail, 2022). According to Ichsan et al. (2021), an effective leadership style can enhance employees' work motivation, as employees are more likely to feel valued and inspired when led in a supportive and participatory manner. Additionally, leadership style strongly affects employee performance, as the right approach can boost commitment and productivity while helping employees achieve organizational goals (Yang et al., 2021).

Leadership style has a major influence on employee work motivation. Leaders who create a positive and supportive work environment encourage employees to feel appreciated and motivated to work harder (Annisa & Supriyanto, 2021). Leaders who provide clear direction, listen to input, and involve employees in decision-making can foster a sense of responsibility and ownership of tasks (Cahyadi et al., 2020). Conversely, an authoritarian or ineffective leadership style can reduce employee motivation, self-confidence, and performance (Irfan, 2022; Bwalya, 2023; Abdelwahed et al., 2023). Leadership style is also closely related to employee performance. Effective leaders create supportive working conditions, provide direction, and constructive feedback, thereby increasing work efficiency and productivity (Parashakti & Ekhsan, 2020; Baig et al., 2021). Therefore, the right leadership style is very important to encourage the achievement of optimal performance in the organization (Chen et al., 2021; Aljumah, 2023).

H1: Leadership style has a significant effect on work motivation.

H2: Leadership style has a significant effect on employee performance.

Work Motivation and Employee Performance

Motivation is the drive or work spirit that arises from within an employee to achieve specific goals (Riyanto et al., 2021). Motivation plays a crucial role in determining the extent of effort someone exerts in fulfilling their tasks and responsibilities. When employees are highly motivated, they tend to demonstrate strong dedication and commitment to their work. According to Parashakti and Ekhsan (2020), motivation can come from within the individual (intrinsic), such as a sense of responsibility, personal satisfaction, or a desire for self-development, or from external sources (extrinsic), such as incentives, rewards, or recognition from superiors. Aliyyah et al. (2021) state that strong motivation makes employees more diligent, persistent, and enthusiastic about their work, making them less likely to give up when facing challenges. Although other factors also influence performance—such as ability, psychological condition, individual character, and organizational support—motivation remains a key element that drives employees to deliver their best performance (Haryono & Sulistyono, 2020). An employee may be competent, but without motivation, they are unlikely to achieve optimal results.

Therefore, creating a work environment that fosters and maintains motivation is essential for enhancing employee productivity and performance in the long term (Purnamasari, 2021; Vo et al., 2022). Acosta-Gonzaga and Ramirez-Arellano (2021) and

Fenny et al. (2024) have shown a positive relationship between motivation levels and high performance. Highly motivated employees tend to be more productive, enthusiastic at work, and have a strong commitment to achieving organizational goals. Such employees are more actively involved in the work process, capable of working independently or in teams, and more open to challenges and change (Riyanto et al., 2021). Motivation also encourages them to enhance their competencies and seek new ways to complete tasks more efficiently (Virgiawan et al., 2021; Faraz et al., 2021). Conversely, employees with low motivation tend to be passive, show little initiative, and their performance tends to stagnate. Therefore, it is important for organizations to continuously pay attention to factors that can sustain and boost employee motivation, such as fair rewards, open communication, career development opportunities, and a supportive work environment (Tamam, 2022).

H3: Work motivation has a significant effect on employee performance.

H4: Work motivation mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance.

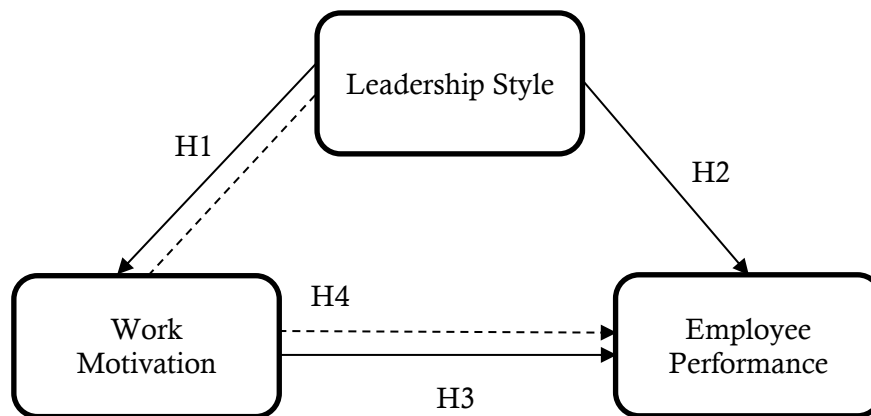


Figure 1. Research Framework

Figure 1 shows the research framework that describes the relationship between leadership style, work motivation, and employee performance. There are four hypotheses explained in this model. H1 states that leadership style influences work motivation, while H2 shows the direct influence of leadership style on employee performance. H3 states that work motivation influences employee performance. Meanwhile, H4 describes the indirect relationship between leadership style and employee performance through work motivation as a mediating variable. This framework describes the causal relationship between the variables studied.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative approach with the aim of examining the relationship between leadership style, work motivation, and employee performance in the public sector. This approach was chosen because it provides objective and measurable results and enables the statistical analysis of causal relationships between variables. Data were collected using a questionnaire designed in a five-point Likert scale format, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with statements related to their supervisor's leadership style, their level of work motivation, and their perceptions of their own performance.

The population of this study consists of all public sector employees working in Central Sulawesi. The sampling technique used was simple random sampling, which gives each member of the population an equal chance of being selected, thus minimizing sampling bias. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed online via email to the targeted employees. Out of the total questionnaires sent, 206 were returned. However,

after filtering and checking the completeness of the data, 34 questionnaires were deemed invalid due to incompleteness or inaccuracy. Therefore, the final sample analyzed consisted of 172 respondents.

Data analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach, operated through SmartPLS 3.0 software. PLS-SEM was chosen for its ability to analyze complex structural models, including direct and indirect effects as well as mediation roles among latent variables. This technique is also suitable for data that are not normally distributed and for relatively small sample sizes, making it appropriate for the characteristics of the current study. Through this approach, the research was able to evaluate the strength of relationships between variables, the validity and reliability of the instruments, and explain the extent to which leadership style and work motivation contribute to enhancing employee performance in the public sector.

RESULTS

Data analysis began with the outer loading test, which examines indicator validity to ensure that each indicator accurately represents the construct it measures. In this study, an indicator is considered valid if it has an outer loading value of at least 0.60. Next, construct reliability testing was conducted to assess the internal consistency among indicators within a construct. Reliability was measured using Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum threshold set at 0.70. Values above this threshold indicate that the construct has an adequate level of reliability. Convergent validity was also tested to ensure that the indicators within a construct are highly correlated. This test was supported by examining the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value, which ideally should be greater than 0.60 to confirm indicator validity. Once the constructs were confirmed to be valid and reliable, hypothesis testing was carried out using the bootstrapping method in SmartPLS 3. The goal was to determine the significance of the relationships between variables, based on a t-statistic > 1.96 and a p-value < 0.05 . These values indicate statistically significant relationships between the variables in the tested model. The R Square (R^2) value was evaluated to assess how much the independent variables contribute to explaining the dependent variable. The higher the R^2 value, the greater the model's ability to explain the research variables.

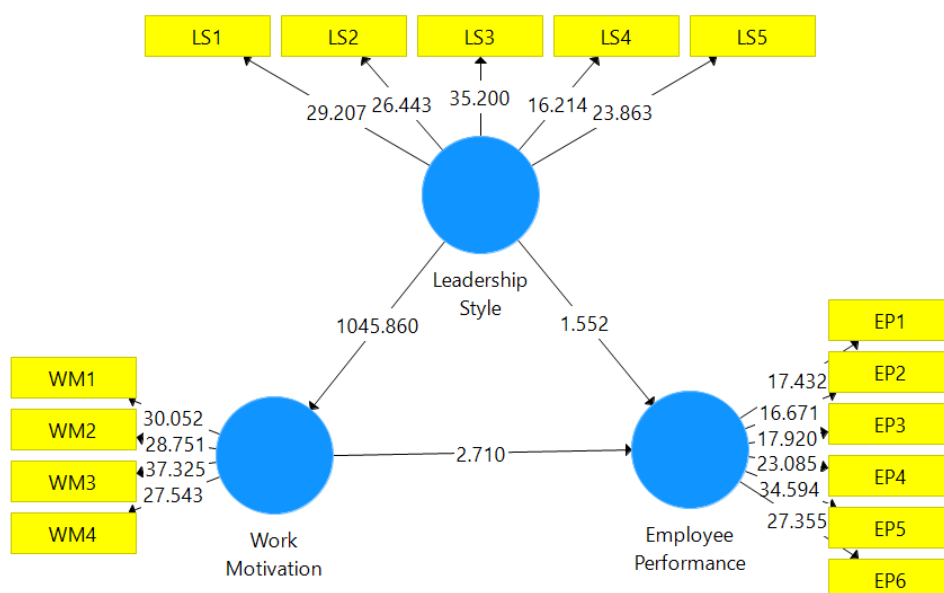


Figure 2. Outer Loading Analysis

Table 1. Outer Loading

Variable		Outer Loading
Leadership Style	LS1	0.838
	LS2	0.807
	LS3	0.862
	LS4	0.770
	LS5	0.843
Work Motivation	WM1	0.841
	WM2	0.820
	WM3	0.864
	WM4	0.860
Employee Performance	EP1	0.750
	EP2	0.748
	EP3	0.772
	EP4	0.804
	EP5	0.853
	EP6	0.795

Table 1 presents the results of the outer loading test, which was used to assess the validity of the indicators in representing the latent constructs in the research model. Outer loading measures how well each indicator represents the construct it is intended to measure. According to PLS-SEM methodology literature, an outer loading value of ≥ 0.60 is considered to meet the minimum validity requirement, with values ≥ 0.70 being preferable as they indicate a stronger contribution to the construct. For the Leadership Style construct, all five indicators (LS1 to LS5) showed high outer loading values, ranging from 0.770 to 0.862. Indicator LS3 had the highest value (0.862), indicating that it is the strongest in reflecting the leadership style construct. All indicators for this construct are considered valid as they exceed the minimum threshold of 0.70. Similarly, in the Work Motivation construct, all four indicators (WM1 to WM4) also showed excellent outer loading values, ranging from 0.820 to 0.864. WM3 had the highest contribution, with an outer loading value of 0.864, indicating that it is highly representative of the work motivation construct. Meanwhile, for the Employee Performance construct, six indicators (EP1 to EP6) had outer loading values ranging from 0.748 to 0.853. Although EP1 and EP2 had the lowest values (0.750 and 0.748 respectively), they still exceeded the 0.70 threshold and are therefore deemed valid. The indicator with the highest contribution in this construct was EP5 (0.853), meaning it strongly represents employee performance.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Leadership Style	0.882	0.914	0.680
Work Motivation	0.868	0.910	0.716
Employee Performance	0.878	0.907	0.621

Table 2 presents the results of construct reliability and convergent validity testing through three main statistical indicators: Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). These three indicators are used to ensure that the constructs in the research model exhibit internal consistency and appropriately represent the latent variables. The results for Cronbach's Alpha indicate that all constructs have values above 0.70, which is the recommended minimum threshold in quantitative research. The Leadership Style construct has a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.882, Work Motivation scores 0.868, and Employee Performance scores 0.878. These values demonstrate that the indicators within each construct have a high level of internal consistency and can be considered reliable. For Composite Reliability, which is considered more appropriate in the context of PLS-SEM as it takes into account the contribution of each indicator, all constructs also show excellent results. Leadership Style has a Composite Reliability of 0.914, Work Motivation scores 0.910, and Employee Performance scores 0.907. All values exceed the 0.70 threshold, and are close to or exceed 0.90, indicating very high reliability.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test was conducted to assess convergent validity, which refers to the extent to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. The results show that Leadership Style has an AVE of 0.680, Work Motivation scores 0.716, and Employee Performance scores 0.621. All three exceed the minimum value of 0.50, meaning that more than 50% of the variance in the indicators is explained by their respective constructs. This indicates that the constructs in the model possess good convergent validity. Therefore, based on the results of the reliability and validity tests, it can be concluded that all constructs used in the study meet the established criteria for reliability and validity. This provides a solid foundation for proceeding to the hypothesis testing phase in the structural model.

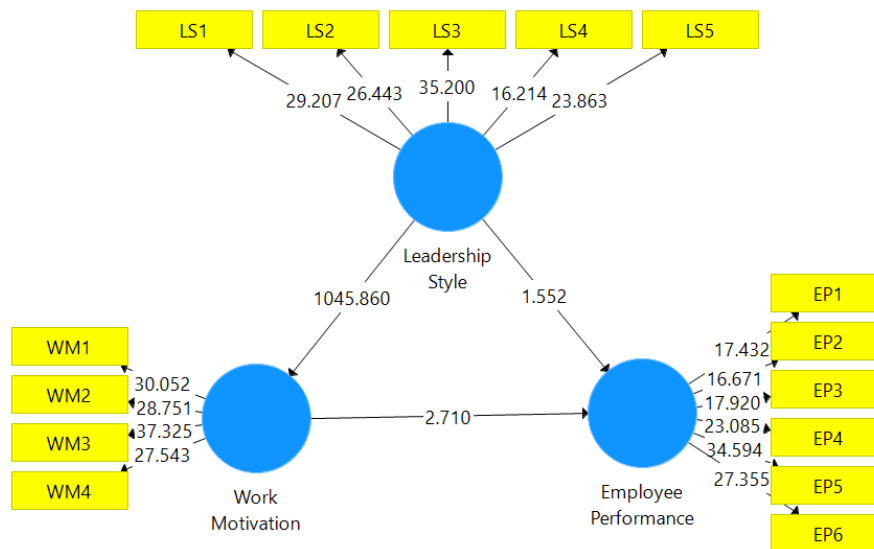


Figure 3. Hypothesis Framework

Table 3. Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Std. Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
Leadership Style -> Work Motivation	0.001	1,045.860	0.000
Leadership Style -> Employee Performance	0.434	1.552	0.121
Work Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.418	2.710	0.007
Leadership Style -> Work Motivation -> Employee Performance	0.415	2.705	0.007

Table 3 presents the results of hypothesis testing in the structural model of the study, which examines the relationships between Leadership Style, Work Motivation, and Employee Performance, including the mediating effect of Work Motivation. The testing was conducted using the bootstrapping method, with evaluation based on the t-statistic and p-value. A relationship is considered statistically significant if the t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 at a 5% significance level. The first hypothesis, which tests the effect of Leadership Style on Work Motivation, shows a highly significant result with a t-statistic of 1,045.860 and p-value of 0.000. This very large t-value indicates that leadership style has a very strong and significant effect on employee work motivation. The second hypothesis, testing the effect of Leadership Style on Employee Performance, results in a t-statistic of 1.552 and a p-value of 0.121. Since the t-statistic is less than 1.96 and the p-value is greater than 0.05, the direct effect of leadership style on employee performance is not statistically significant.

The third hypothesis examines the effect of Work Motivation on Employee Performance, and the result shows a significant relationship with a t-statistic of 2.710 and p-value of 0.007. This means that higher employee work motivation leads to higher performance. The fourth hypothesis tests the mediating role of Work Motivation in the relationship between Leadership Style and Employee Performance. The result is

significant, with a t-statistic of 2.705 and p-value of 0.007. This indicates that leadership style influences employee performance indirectly through the enhancement of work motivation. Thus, there is a significant mediation effect, and the mediation hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4. R Square (R²)

Variable	R Square	R Square Adjusted
Work Motivation	0.980	0.979
Employee Performance	0.228	0.218

Table 4 presents the R Square (R²) and Adjusted R Square values for the dependent variables, namely Work Motivation and Employee Performance, in the research model. The R² value indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that can be explained by the independent variables in the model. The higher the R² value, the greater the model's ability to explain the variable.

For the Work Motivation variable, the R Square value is 0.980 and the Adjusted R Square is 0.979. This means that 98% of the variation in work motivation can be explained by the Leadership Style variable, with only 2% explained by factors outside the model. This very high value indicates that the model has a very strong predictive power for employee work motivation. The slightly lower adjusted R² value (0.979) suggests that the model is stable and does not suffer from significant overfitting.

Meanwhile, for the Employee Performance variable, the R Square value of 0.228 and Adjusted R Square value of 0.218 indicate that only 22.8% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by the variables Leadership Style and Work Motivation, while the remaining 77.2% is influenced by other variables not included in this model. This value is considered low to moderate, indicating that the model has limitations in explaining all the factors affecting employee performance. Nevertheless, in the context of social and organizational behavior, an R² value above 0.20 is still acceptable, especially when supported by significant hypothesis testing results.

DISCUSSION

The research results show that leadership style has a significant effect on employee work motivation, but it does not have a significant direct effect on employee performance. On the other hand, work motivation is proven to have a significant impact on performance and also serves as an effective mediating variable that bridges the influence of leadership style on employee performance. These findings indicate that in the context of public organizations, the leadership applied by supervisors will have a tangible impact only if it can enhance the internal motivation of employees. In other words, leadership style does not automatically affect performance; rather, it must go through a process of generating work enthusiasm, psychological encouragement, and individual responsibility for assigned tasks. Only with high work motivation can employee performance improve significantly.

These results align with Donkor et al. (2021), who argued that transformational leadership has the power to enhance employees' intrinsic motivation, which ultimately positively affects performance. Transformational leaders who can inspire, provide individual attention, and instill a shared vision create a work environment that motivates and supports personal growth. In this context, the role of a leader is not merely to provide direction but also to foster a work climate that encourages emotional and psychological engagement among employees. Furthermore, Khan et al. (2023) also emphasized that participative or democratic leadership, which involves employees in decision-making processes, can increase a sense of ownership, self-confidence, and commitment to the organization. The effect of this increased motivation subsequently leads to improvements in work quality and overall performance. These findings confirm that work motivation acts as a bridge between leadership and employee work outcomes.

This study is also consistent with the research by Hafidzi et al. (2023), which states that in the public sector work environment, motivational factors such as job satisfaction, rewards, and recognition often have a greater influence on performance than direct orders from supervisors. Public sector employees tend to respond more positively to approaches that foster self-esteem and personal contribution to organizational goals. These findings strengthen the conceptual framework in organizational behavior management that positions motivation as an intervening variable between managerial factors (such as leadership style) and organizational outcomes (such as performance). This has important practical implications for public sector managers: effective leadership is leadership that not only focuses on instructions or supervision but also is capable of fostering work motivation through an inspirational, supportive, and participative approach.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that leadership style has a significant influence on employee work motivation but does not have a direct effect on employee performance. Conversely, work motivation is proven to have a significant impact on performance and also significantly mediates the relationship between leadership style and employee performance. In other words, the effectiveness of leadership in improving employee performance highly depends on its ability to stimulate work motivation. These findings emphasize that, in the context of public organizations, leaders cannot simply provide directions and instructions but must be able to build employees' work spirit, sense of responsibility, and emotional engagement with their tasks. An inspirational, supportive, and participative leadership style will have a greater impact if it can intrinsically motivate employees. Furthermore, for a more comprehensive improvement in performance, other factors such as training, reward systems, and supportive working conditions need to be considered. Human resource development policies in the public sector should integrate leadership and motivation aspects as priorities.

This study has limitations in the scope of variables used, as only leadership style and work motivation were analyzed as predictors of employee performance. In addition, the sample was limited to employees in Central Sulawesi, so generalizing the results to other regions or sectors should be done with caution. Future research is recommended to include additional variables that may affect employee performance, such as job satisfaction, work environment, work stress, organizational support, and organizational culture factors. Moreover, longitudinal studies could be conducted to observe changes in the influence of leadership and motivation on performance more comprehensively over time. Lastly, expanding the research sample across various regions and sectors will strengthen the validity and applicability of the study's findings.

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